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Reconsider mileage rate

The Sullivan County Commissioners had a golden opportunity to probe for some additional cost savings in the county budget during their discussion on mileage reimbursement when they met earlier this week.

Unfortunately, that never happened.

Following a brief discussion, the commissioners voted 2-1 to set the mileage reimbursement for county employees at 55 cents per mile, the maximum allowed at tax time by the Internal Revenue Service. This was a slight reduction from the previous figure of 58.5 cents per mile.

Only Commissioner Ethel Jarvis found fault with the generous 55-cent rate. As in the past, Jarvis said she would be more comfortable with a rate in the vicinity of 40 cents per mile.

If there are any private business firms or industries here in Sullivan County paying anywhere near 55 cents per mile they are probably few and far between.

Perhaps the money gained with a mileage rate of 40 cents wouldn't result in a significant savings between now and June 30th. If any county official had that information readily at hand, however, it was never discussed at Wednesday's meeting.

This would have been a perfect opportunity for the commissioners to keep the mileage reimbursement at 58.5 cents a mile for the next two weeks, allowing time to research the potential savings at a lower rate.

Keep in mind this is a county that flirted with a \$4 million deficit within the last year that taxpayers are now being called on to pay back. That deficit number should be carved into the top of the conference table where commissioners meet as a constant reminder that any found money could be utilized to help pay down this huge debt.

In this case, the numbers should have been researched before a vote was taken. Perhaps the potential savings may have been small, but that doesn't matter. Small numbers add up to bigger totals.

In these troubling economic times, a special effort must be made to ensure that all potential savings are squeezed out of every dollar on the expense side of the budget.

The Sullivan County Commissioners should reconsider their vote in support of paying mileage reimbursement at 55 cents a mile. A more acceptable lower rate would also send a signal that all line items within the county budget would be fair game for review on a regular basis.

All county employees should be right in the middle of the cost-savings loop. Some of the best ideas could be there, just for the asking.

The county budget is no different than town or school budgets. All three involve making difficult decisions that certainly won't please everyone but it is the taxpayers who must pay the final bill, whatever it may be.

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